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Interview with Jane Gray Muskie by Don Nicoll

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Muskie, Jane Gray

Interviewer

Nicoll, Don

Date

May 3, 2002

Place

Bethesda, Maryland

ID Number

MOH 353

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Biographical Note

Jane (Gray) Muskie was born on February 12, 1927 to Myrtie (Jackson) and Millage Guy Gray. She grew up in the Waterville, Maine area, graduating from Waterville High School. Her father died when she was about 10 years old, so her mother supported the family. During the summers, Jane and her mother traveled to various resorts in Maine so her mother could cook. Jane's first job was dishwashing at one of these resorts. After graduation from high school, Jane worked in downtown Waterville at clothing stores. At the age of eighteen, she met Ed Muskie, a Waterville lawyer. They dated for three years before marrying in 1948. In 1986, she and Abigail McCarthy wrote a book entitled One Woman Lost, which focused on being married to politicians. At the time of the interview, she lived in Bethesda, Maryland. Jane passed away on December 25, 2004.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: 1968 Senate campaign; Maine "Favorite Son" debates; Chicago convention; the Humphreys; raising her children during the vice presidential campaign; her involvement with the campaign; relationship with Eugene and Abigail McCarthy; writing a book with Abigail McCarthy; Muskie and Humphrey's working relationships; Ed's disappointment after losing the vice presidential race; New Hampshire media and Bill Loeb;

party in Waterville after the presidential campaign; Ed Muskie's mother and the 1968 and 1972 campaigns; Jane Muskie and Mary Hoyt on the snowy New Hampshire bus ride; the negative articles after the bus ride; Ed's Manchester speech; Humphrey and Muskie family vacation after the 1968 election; Ed Muskie and politics after the 1972 election; religion and Ed Muskie; Secretary of State; Nestle Infant Formula Audit Commission (NIFAC); traveling during Ed's later career; Equal Access to Justice in Maine; and Muskie's career plan.

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Transcript

Don Nicoll: It is the 3rd of May, the year 2002. We are at the home of Mrs. Jane Muskie, and Don Nicoll is interviewing her, this is the second interview with Mrs. Muskie. Jane, at the last conversation we were talking about, at the end of the conversation we were talking about the Senate years between 1959 and 1968 roughly. And we had agreed we'd pick up at the next conversation with the 1968 campaign. That was a hurley-burley summer for a variety of reasons. Did you get to Maine that summer, or were you staying in Washington.

Jane Muskie: Oh, I'm sure I got to Maine because I would never let anything keep me from going to Maine in the summer.

DN: But there were rumors abounding before the Democratic National Convention in August that Ed might be Hubert's selection as vice president. There had been a brief flurry at the

Democratic State Convention in the spring over the issue of whether Ed should be the favorite son of Maine or not because of the contest between, at that time, Vice President Humphrey, Senator Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, and Gene McCarthy and others, and George McGovern of course. Did you go to Chicago with Ed?

JM: No, I didn't go on that trip.

DN: So you were not at the convention. And after the convention we went to Waverly, Minnesota to meet Vice President Humphrey, Mrs. Humphrey, and staff.

JM: Oh, I guess I was there.

DN: You were there, and went to Waverly. How much had you known Vice President Humphrey and Mrs. Humphrey before then?

JM: Well, since we had done a lot of campaigning practically side by side, we both knew them quite well. And Ed, of course, knew Hubert better than I did because they literally went through the Senate together. But Mrs. Humphrey and I had, actually it was the first time I had campaigned on a national level, years before, and she was the opponent. And so I had gotten to know her quite well during that campaign. And also between Senate wives and other Washington groups.

DN: And after that initial meeting that the senator and the vice president and staff had, we jumped right into the campaign, and you had to play a role from time to time, going on the road with the Senator. You must have had quite a bit of juggling to do with the family and making arrangements with them. How old was Ned at that point?

JM: Oh, Don, I don't remember. But he was very young.

DN: Ned was born in, when? Dates. But he was young, and -

JM: He was very young. And I do remember that he was, I did enroll him in a private school since I was going to be away from home a lot of the time.

DN: [You may hear sounds on the side, it is a little white terrier, Scots terrier.]

JM: Anyway, after I got Ned ensconced in a private school so that I knew he was being well taken care of, we went off on the road most of the time and came home weekends. And it wasn't a bad life, but it wasn't great either.

DN: When talking with Martha earlier, and Ned, they recounted their time with the Secret Service agents who became almost part of the family.

JM: Well, at least they thought they were part of the family. I had to rely on them for, to tell Ned to quiet down when he was out after dark at night, and all of that sort of thing. But actually it was very comforting to me to know that they were there, and that I didn't have to worry about

the kids or their care. And it was not a bad time at all, although I sort of faced it with fear and trepidation.

DN: Now, the primary period in which Ed wasn't directly involved was very intense, and there were a lot of strong feelings obviously because of the Vietnam controversies. And Senator McCarthy had been a, one I think could fairly say, fierce opponent of the vice president. But you were a very good friend of Mrs. McCarthy. How did that continue during the campaign, did it make for any difficulties, or did you see each other, talk to each other through that period.

JM: Oh well, we never allowed, either one of us, to let something like that get between our friendship. We had, for one thing Abigail and I had co-authored a book at that time.

(Interruption with guests.)

DN: You were talking about Mrs. McCarthy and you and your friendship, and you authored a book together.

JM: Right, we did. And that was a while before this last part of our friendship, because she became very ill and ultimately died. But we were always very good and very close friends.

DN: How did you come to write the book together?

JM: Well, as I recall, we started writing the book together because she was a good writer by herself. And she didn't have a book in the mill, and she wanted me to help her write a book. She said she was simply out of ideas. And so we did, and I can't remember what we called it, I think it was called One Woman Lost. And it was not a terribly lengthy book but it was, it came out okay. The people in New York who put these things on the market thought that it was good enough so that they purchased it. And of course I was thrilled because I'd never had anything even close to being published, and Abigail had had quite a few things in her time of working alone. And I had decided right then that I was never going to work alone after I saw how hard she had to work. But anyway it, the book turned out okay, and we struggled through.

DN: What kind of a book was it?

JM: Well, it was a book about women whose husbands were in politics and, as you can imagine. And that's the easiest way to write is what you know something about.

DN: This was a novel.

JM: Hm-hmm. And it turned out to be okay. I told my kids afterwards that I would never do that again because it was too unnerving to see something that you've written in print.

DN: The hard part came when it went into print, rather than while working on the book?

JM: For me it did.

DN: How did you do the work, did you divide it up, or did you -?

JM: Abigail's children were, had gone from her nest, and she didn't really have the interruptions that I had, but she had other things that kept her busy. And toward the end of writing that book she became quite ill. So it wasn't an easy book to get out to the public but we just were determined that, she because of her illness and me because of my family, we both wanted to not just get, have it published but to just have it finished. It was just sort of a, beginning to get in our way, especially hers because she had other things that she wanted to do at that time.

DN: During the 1968 campaign, I remember particularly on the campaign trail how often Senator Muskie and Vice President Humphrey talked on the phone, but I also remember that they had very different styles and circadian rhythms. That is, Ed tended to get up early in the morning, work hard, and go to bed early, and Vice President Humphrey started late and loved to go until two, three in the morning. What can you tell us about your observations of their relationship, how they really worked together with such different personalities and rhythms.

JM: Well, it's true they had different personalities, but that certainly didn't keep them apart. They, as I recall, they met mostly late in the afternoon after they had come in off the road. And they'd sit down and have a glass of beer or something and talk over the day's, wherever they had been and whatever they had done, and how it looked to them, whether it was going to be okay or not okay. And I enjoyed that part because I used to try to sit in and listen because I enjoyed that, but they liked each other's company, for one thing. And I think they had been such long time friends, I think that was the only time of the day that they could get together.

DN: The campaign was very tight; Ed was regarded as a major contributor to the fact that they came so close at the end. How did he feel at the end when it came so close and it didn't quite come off?

JM: Didn't quite make it. You're talking about Ed?

DN: Yeah.

JM: Well, I suppose he was disappointed, but you know, he never told me he was disappointed. I think at times he was relieved that maybe they wouldn't have to go through a long arduous season of politics again. I think they were both getting ready to kind of, not quit, but to just slow down. It's really tough being on the road, as you well know. And especially when they were in New England, it was hard on Ed because he felt like he was home and that they were, you know, really watching him. And every day there was another piece in the paper, most of which were good, but sometimes they weren't so good. And those were the days when the, who was that man from New Hampshire who was -?

DN: William Loeb.

JM: Oh yes, how could I ever forget William Loeb. Anyway -

DN: Your dear friend.

JM: My dear friend, yes. Anyway, but those, in those days politics was, you know, downright dirty, and I was pretty happy afterwards that Ed didn't feel that he should go on and on and on and on. So, but on the other hand, they did come fairly close to carrying some of the states.

DN: At the end of the campaign, we all flew back to Maine and went to Waterville and had quite an evening at the motel in Waterville, and at the Armory if I recall correctly.

JM: Oh, that was the most fun of all.

DN: Do you remember some of the events of that night?

JM: Not really. I just remember the huge crowd that met us. And I don't know where we had been that day, but I know we had been very, we were very tired.

DN: Well, we started the day in, not Los Angeles, but Burbank, California, and flew cross country, stopping in St. Louis. And we had a distinguished passenger on the way back, one John Kenneth Galbraith.

JM: Oh, my heavens, yes.

DN: Who was about ready to take over Ed's bed because it was long enough.

JM: Long enough, right, I remember that.

DN: And back in Waterville, what I remember and wondered if you recall the jazz band with Dick Dubord and Bob Marden and some of your long time friends who were accomplished musicians, among other things.

JM: Right. Well that was very nostalgic because it wasn't too long after that some of those nice people passed away.

DN: As I recall, Mrs. Muskie senior was at the party that night, and that calls to mind a question about her. Ed talked frequently about his dad and his contributions to his life, and I've often wondered about his mother who must have been a very strong person. And I remember the story of her being told by her husband-to-be, he was taking her to Rumford, Maine of all places, from Buffalo, and I wondered how you viewed her when you met her and saw her both in relation to her husband and in relation to Ed.

JM: Well, she was a very easy person to like, and I had no problems with anyone in his family, especially his mother. She was really a very nice woman, and her children were, you could tell that they were all, you know, really pleased with her and happy about her demeanor when she was out on the road with her oldest son. And I think Ed was very pleased, too, that she would do that for him, because it certainly was not part of her ordinary life.

DN: Was she shy, or simply used to being out of the limelight?

JM: Well, she never had been in the limelight, so I don't even think she knew what it was. But it really didn't take very long for her to catch on, she was really a very smart woman. And I have wonderful pictures of her taken with Ed because he, in the latter days of the campaign, Ed had her stand beside him and people loved it, the press especially, because that gave them a whole new personage to write about.

DN: And she lived through '72 didn't she?

JM: Umm, hm-hmm.

DN: Seventy-two, the whole period between 1969 and '72 was challenging, to say the least. And before Chappaquiddick, I know from the perspective of a staff person, it was frustrating for Ed. How did you see him reacting to the political pressures and the difficulties of getting attention?

JM: Well, I often worried about him because he was in a whole other field at that point, and I just, I kept thinking, oh dear, he'll have a heart attack or something terrible might happen with his traveling all of the time. And that was when he was going across the country and delivering speeches everywhere. And sometimes I went with him but it began to get very tiring for me, and I just had to give up only being at home every Sunday, which I had been doing for the previous year. And I just decided that I needed to stay home with the kids a little more. So those were not very easy days, but thank God they ended quickly.

DN: Well, one of the most difficult times I assume was in the period leading up to the New Hampshire primary, when you did do some campaigning. And we've read stories about it from the point of view of the press; what was it like on that famous bus trip when you were heading into the North Country in a snowstorm?

JM: Well, I think you're probably talking about the man that wasn't so nice?

DN: I was, ultimately he was involved, but on that bus trip it was very stormy and a very difficult bus ride, and according to Mary Hoyt, you were trying to help the press people, most of whom were women, get through it.

JM: Well, I tried to help them, but some of them then sort of turned their backs and decided to write uncomfortable things about me. And so it didn't turn out to be a very nice bus trip, which I had hoped it would be. So many of the people on the bus were scared to death to be riding out in the banks of snow, and others were, kept wanting to get off so they could, to get their articles in to their press people. I don't know, we just started to sing, and we tried, Mary and I tried to cheer them up, and that didn't work obviously.

But one of the press persons on the bus wrote a very derogatory article about me, and thank goodness it was about me. I would have died if it had been about Mary or someone else on the bus, but by that time I was able to take it. And it was probably the worst time. Mary and I are

still good friends and once in a while we talk to each other about the bad days, the good days and so forth. But we certainly don't dwell on them, and we don't remember with any particular amount of love for those people who were not very friendly, but however, we survived and managed to get through it okay.

DN: Now, subsequently the *Manchester Union Leader* and its editor, Bill Loeb, wrote a scathing editorial attacking you. And Ed got very angry, delivered a public rebuke to Loeb, and was alleged in a report by, I believe the first one was from David Broder, to have cried, which in those days was not regarded as sympathetically as it might be today. My question to you is, before Ed delivered that public rebuke to Loeb, did he discuss with you at any length his feelings about the attack on you and how he proposed to deal with it?

JM: No, he didn't really discuss it with me. I probably would have said, "Don't do it. It'll come home to haunt you, and I can take it." But I didn't say that. And Mary Hoyt was the person who said to him, "I think, Senator, you ought to tell it like it was, not how they wanted it to be." So anyway, it really never did come really home to haunt me, but it wasn't a pleasant situation. Anyway, he had to explain himself when we got home to Maine to a lot of audiences, though, and I felt really badly that he had to go through that. But he kept assuring me that everything would be okay, and it was.

DN: Now, we jumped ahead in one respect, (*brief interruption*) because at the end of the 1968 campaign, as I recall, your family and the Humphrey family went to the Virgin Islands on a holiday.

JM: Right, right, we did.

DN: Which was a highlight for the young people, and what was it like for you?

JM: Oh, it was fun, it was fun. For one thing, we didn't have to worry about our children for the whole time we were there, and, because they were with us, and we had a great time. The two families got together, and our children had never met the Humphrey children and vice-versa, and it really was a very pleasant time to sort of wind up. And I don't know about their kids, but our children talked about it for a long time afterwards.

DN: Nineteen seventy-two wound up with a defeat in the primaries, and Senator McGovern was nominated. After that, how did Ed feel about campaigning or his future public life? Did he talk much about it?

JM: Well, I don't remember everything, but I do remember that he was really I think what you would call relieved. I think he, as much as he loved politics, I think he was tired and he simply wanted to go on with his life. Oh, I just think, I think that it was a big relief to him, really. I remember we took off for South China, and went down there for a while. And the kids were skating, ice skating, and it was, I think it was a good ending, too. Perhaps not what he had wished in the long run, but you know, the great thing about him was that he accepted things, he didn't, he never complained about not carrying a district or, he, to me at least he never did. Now, to people like you who were maybe traveling with him he may have complained. But, I think by

that point he had had enough.

DN: But the next seven years, he was deeply involved in some of his most creative legislative work, and he turned to that with energy. Did you sense that at home?

JM: Well, only when it was pointed out to me. You know, I didn't, for instance I didn't go in and read his papers every night or anything. Sometimes I did, but not often. Or if someone called on the phone and said, "Gee, that piece that Ed wrote for the paper or something was terrific," I paid a little more attention. But he worked hard after that. And I remember his writing lots of really good stuff, and it was amazing to me that after going through what he had been through, that he still wanted to write. Do you remember when he wrote the Prayer at Midnight? And that sort of thing always surprised me, that he could go through all of that and then decide to turn out something as nice as that was.

DN: He was a very private man about his religious faith, but one got the impression that it was a very strong force in his life.

JM: I think it was. I can't tell you about his childhood, but I do know that his mother and father were very religious people, and I think that he would not have possibly been something other than what they were. And we happened to be Catholic, but he didn't dwell on going to church, or he didn't dwell on talking about religion particularly, that I remember. But he certainly did make sure that our children went to church. And I think it was sort of an inbred thing with him, because of his parents.

DN: One little anecdote that you may not have known about, in 1969 he and Berl Bernhard and I went to London where Ed was to speak to a group of, actually, conservatives. They had a conference and invited him to speak. And on Sunday, we were in London, I think Berl had gone off to see some friends, but Sunday morning Ed informed me that I was to find a church where he could go to Mass. And here we were, all by ourselves. He'd had a strenuous time with the travel and then the conference, but that Sunday morning he wanted to go to Mass. And we went to a very small church near the hotel as I recall, and I don't think there were more than about ten or fifteen people at Mass, in addition to him and me.

JM: Well, that sounds very familiar to me because he often did things like that. And he never seemed to do it out of the sense that he was, he had to do it, but he always wanted, he just plain wanted to go to church.

DN: At the end of his public official life, if you will, President Carter tapped him to become secretary of state, which must have come as quite a shock to you, as well as to him.

JM: Well, it was a pretty big shock, but it, by that time things were such that I guess we could have accepted anything. And I think that was a rather nice thing for Hubert to do.

DN: You mean for President Carter.

JM: President Carter to do. I think it was, it was, gave him something to look forward to, and

I just remember that that was sort of a happy time.

DN: He really enjoyed being secretary of state?

JM: I think so. Now, I don't know to what extent, but I don't think he hated it, but I think there were parts of it that he liked better than other.

DN: What sorts of things did he like, and what sorts of things didn't he like?

JM: Well, for one thing, he was tired. And I just remember that when he got up in the morning he'd say, "Oh, I'd give anything if I didn't have to go to work," which was so unlike him, because he really liked to go to work. But he got through that period rather quickly, and went on to other things, getting back to being in an office all day. Actually, he got so that he liked being in his office all day. And a lot of people, because he was well known by then, a lot of people came to see him, and it was a much more pleasant way for him to cool off and come down off from the high.

DN: Are you speaking now of the time as secretary of state or after secretary of state when he joined the law firm?

JM: When he joined the law firm.

DN: And during that period, he got involved in some pretty intense work. For example, the Nestle Infant Formula Audit Commission [NIFAC], and did a fair amount of traveling.

JM: He did.

DN: Were you able to travel with him much during that time?

JM: Well, frankly, from choice, I really didn't want to travel that much any more, and oftentimes I didn't go. But there were times, especially if it was a place where I thought I might visit old friends, I would go along with him. But I don't know, it was just, he wasn't all that anxious to just take off and fly to Europe or someplace all the time. And he promised the kids that he would be home every weekend, which was a big commitment for him, and he was.

I remember when one of the kids' birthdays came up, and I've forgotten where we were but we weren't in town. And he said, "Well, you know, this is one of the days that belongs to the kids, so we have to go back." And we always did. But there were other times when, if he was alone, he, you know, if he could make it, fine, if he couldn't make it, why That's one good thing about our children now, they remember those days and they never thought he was terrible for not being around all the time.

DN: I take it that he made it clear to them that he wanted to spend time with them?

JM: Oh, it was very clear, believe me.

DN: Was he a disciplinarian with them?

JM: Not particularly a disciplinarian, but he told them what he thought and, but he never, even when the children were teeny tiny, he never spanked them. He never said, “You better be good or I’ll stand you in the corner.” He really was not a disciplinarian. If there was any discipline to be done, it had to be done by me. And I wasn’t so tough either.

DN: The life of Ed Muskie was one dominated by public service right up, practically, to the time he died. And I remember particularly the work he was doing very late on equal access to justice in Maine.

JM: He loved that, he really enjoyed doing that and thinking about it, and getting on the phone and talking with people about it. He would have done that morning, noon, and night really, he did, he really liked, he liked that.

DN: Was that just a passion over access to justice, or did it involve the fact that it was in Maine?

JM: Well, maybe a little of each. But I think it was something that he truly believed in and wanted to do. And the fact that he hadn’t discovered it before, I think he really liked a new, something new to try to take to heart. I know when he used to go up to Maine and spend the nights at different people’s homes and go to the meetings the next day. That was really, that was one of his happy moments because he felt like he was reconnecting, I think. He’d been, you know, away for a while.

DN: Maine was important to him.

JM: Very. Well, it was his life.

DN: As you look back on Ed’s public service career, what was it you think that drove him the most?

JM: Well, that’s hard to answer because I think sometimes that he drove himself, for one thing. I don’t know, maybe you do, but I don’t know of anybody who could really tell him what to do.

End of Side A
Side B

JM: I think he, there were so many things in life that he enjoyed and believed in, and I think he really, he liked just helping people. He was never happier than if he had some piece of legislation that was going to help people in Skowhegan or somewhere. That really turned him on. That would be the first thing he’d say as he walked in the house that night, “Well, I got it through finally.” And not because it was going to reflect upon him particularly, but because it was simply something he wanted to do, and by gosh he did it.

DN: Did he ever have a career plan?

JM: A career plan? Well, I suppose somewhere down the line, probably before I knew him he may have had a career plan. But the one career plan that I knew about was when he was thinking of becoming a lawyer, and he just couldn't quite take it. He, as you know, he was a lawyer, but he just didn't find that to be the right thing for him to do for life. I think he would have died on the vine. But anyway, that, he didn't do it except for a short time of being in an office in Waterville.

DN: Thank you very much, Jane.

JM: You're welcome.

End of Interview